

Rico board: Residents have right to be informed

Re: "Rico: Make nice with EPA," Nov. 8 editorial.

As a member of the Town of Rico Board of Trustees, I would like to respond to your editorial concerning the board's decision not to approve the Environmental Protection Agency's request for townwide sampling of soils.

Rico has been working closely with the EPA - at our request - and other parties since 1999 towards remediation of the affected areas. ARCO, identified as sharing potential responsibility for the cleanup, has expressed interest in cooperating with the Town of Rico, in concert with another major landholder in the case, and together we have been developing a unique approach towards achieving a cleanup program involving the creation of a joint nonprofit entity to deal with related issues of cleanup, green space and future redevelopment.

Recently, EPA representatives disclosed that their vision of Superfund is much broader than the town initially understood, and it was obvious to us that the EPA was not adequately appreciating the potential for negative consequences of its actions on other important town issues including school enrollment, developing a local economy, property values and our plans for brown-field reclamation. For instance, after many years of negotiations and public hearings, recent amendments to Rico's master plan have clarified our vision for reasonable growth which proposes a certain brown-field area as a good candidate for light industrial or public works for Rico. But Superfund designation would disqualify the site for such use, effectively undoing a significant amount of cooperative effort.

Following Superfund designation in the mid-1980s, residents of an Aspen community encountered difficulty in refinancing their homes. Current plans for new homes, consistent with our master plan, could be significantly jeopardized by Superfund designation.

Your suggestion that Rico's town government "get its priorities straight" is well taken. In doing so, we insist that Rico residents have the right to be fully informed and involved in any federal actions affecting our community, especially EPA enforcement actions. We live in these beautiful mountains for many different reasons and, for most of us, planning for a little growth, cleaning up what we can of our past and preserving as much as possible of our unique wilderness environment tells us our priorities are just fine.

STEVE SNELLING

Rico

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